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NOVEMBER

VOL.
15

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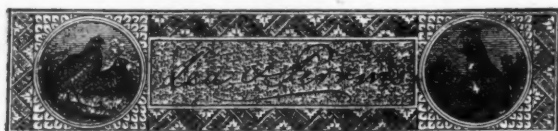
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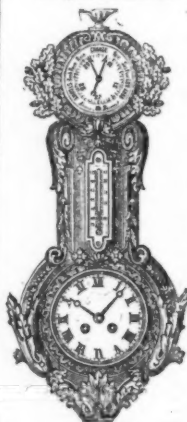
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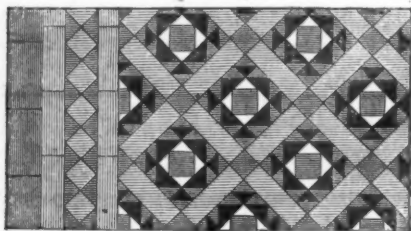
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"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 362. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1875.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

HALVES.

BY JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGER," "A PERFECT TREASURE," "AT HER MERCY," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE NARROWING OF THE NET.

SMALL as the instrument was of which I had so fortunately possessed myself, just as my quest seemed hopeless, its shape did not admit of being placed in the pocket. I huddled it up, therefore, as well as I could, in the breast of my coat, and fled downstairs into the library, where I concealed it, until the already deepening dusk of evening should permit me to carry it unperceived to Mr. Wilde's. To my own room I positively did not dare remove it, since that would have necessitated my passing brother Alec's apartment, where I knew Mrs. Raeburn to be. It was not fear that I now experienced in regard to her—if what the doctor had hinted was correct, I had discovered the proof of something which should put her in fear of me rather—but a certain loathing and abhorrence, begotten partly of my original dislike of her, and partly of the remembrance of that scene of the previous night in the sick man's room, for the terrors of which I somehow held her accountable.

As soon as it grew dark I left the Priory, taking the instrument with me just as it was, but well concealed in the folds of my winter cloak.

"You have found it," were Mr. Wilde's first eager words, when we were left alone together in his parlour. "It was a chopping-machine, very small, and of sharpest steel, was it not?"

"You have described it as well as if you had seen it," said I, producing it from

my cloak. He looked as pleased as a child who has guessed a riddle.

"And yet there are some people, Sheddon, who scoff at science!" exclaimed he vehemently; "who tell us that the Creator, who has endowed man with intelligence, is averse to its exercise, even in His own behalf. He has helped us in this search, no doubt; but unless a miracle had been vouchsafed to us, how, without yonder book, should I have ever suspected the means by which this crime was to have been consummated, and thereby been able to avert it?"

I was wholly unable to account for this outburst, which had relation, doubtless, to that difference of opinion in religious matters that had lost Mr. Wilde his intended wife, and with which I did not till afterwards become acquainted; but at that moment I was only curious to discover the matter which I myself, though as a mere instrument, had brought to so successful an issue.

"I know nothing as yet, remember, Mr. Wilde, of any crime," pleaded I. "You promised me to tell all——"

"I will; but stay one moment;" he rang the bell for his servant. "Go to the Infirmary, and take this note to nurse Hopkins—the woman who came down from town last week; and in the meantime, leave orders that, until she arrives, we are not to be disturbed by anybody. It is a long story, Sheddon, that I have to tell you, and one that must needs have no listener—as I hope—beside yourself; if others force me to make it public, it will be at their own peril. Not another day, not another hour, shall Miss Floyd's life be risked, to save them from the gallows."

"Gertrude's life be risked!" repeated

I, in horror. "Is it her life, then, that is menaced? Until this moment, I deemed that this foul play, at which you hinted, was directed against Mr. Alexander!"

"I know it," was my companion's quiet rejoinder; "and finding your suspicions take that channel, I did not divert them to the true one. If you had thought it possible, nay, probable, as I have done for months, that Gertrude Floyd, the being most dear to you on earth, was being done to death slowly, but certainly, by the hand of her own relative and hostess, yet without one grain of proof to support such a charge—life, under that roof, would have been intolerable, impossible for you. Yet it was necessary, you see, that you should remain there, and by doing so the crime, though late, still in time has been discovered, and the catastrophe averted."

"You are sure that it is in time, Mr. Wilde?" interrupted I, passionately; "that the precious moments are not being wasted, even now, while we are speaking?"

"I am quite sure, my dear lad. Without this talisman here"—he pointed to the machine—"the wicked witch has no power to work her will, nor will she discover its loss, until she is rendered in all other respects powerless. Listen then, without fear, to a story that, indeed, is grim enough, but which can now have no tragical termination."

"When I was first consulted, nearly a year ago, by Miss Floyd, there were circumstances in her case, though I made no mention of them at the time, which puzzled me exceedingly; her symptoms, though common enough in some respects, suggested, in others, those produced by the presence of some irritant poison. These, however, were in a very incipient stage, and on the patient's removal, at my recommendation, to Stanbrook, they disappeared almost immediately. This rapid recovery, which you all hailed with such natural delight, was by no means satisfactory to me. Had her ailment been of an ordinary description, she would have more gradually become convalescent, whereas, if it were caused by some noxious drug or other substance, the administration of which had been intermitted, she would probably have recovered at once, as in fact she did. The nature of Mr. Alexander Raeburn's illness became such as to give me no further excuse for attendance on him on his return to the Priory, and Miss Floyd was thus removed from

under my professional eye. However, since I heard nothing of a relapse in her case, I had begun to think I had been mistaken in my ideas regarding it, until about five months ago, when you requested me again to visit her, since she complained of the same ailments, when my suspicions at once reasserted themselves, and with renewed vigour. I must tell you, too, that they had even then a living object; they had originally been turned towards Mrs. Raeburn, by certain vague expressions dropped from her brother-in-law's lips at Stanbrook, and which, under other circumstances, I should probably have set down as one of the vagaries of a waning brain. 'When I am gone,' he once observed to me, 'take care of Gerty.'"

"He used the very same words, Mr. Wilde, to me!" cried I, "and at about the same time."

"Very likely, though to one in your position they were more natural, and would, therefore, have less significance. It was then that the poor old man began to feel that his intelligence was departing from him, and he wished probably, while it still remained with him, to give us warning of the danger that menaced his favourite."

"But how could he have known the danger?"

"He did not know it, but he had, doubtless, reasons unknown to us for vaguely suspecting it. In the first place, he hated his sister-in-law, and believed her capable (as I do) of committing any atrocity; and secondly, seeing him growing day by day into his second childhood, she was perhaps more imprudent in expressing her feelings towards Gertrude; at all events, he had discovered them to be hostile; and he knew that, after his own demise, his brother Mark would be her heir-at-law."

"That is true," cried I, a flood of light seeming here to pour in upon me. "He, doubtless, feared foul play for her, since, when speaking of himself, before he had made his will, he told me with his own lips that he durst not pass a night at the Priory under the same roof as Mrs. Raeburn while her husband was his heir!"

"The vague words dropped by Mrs. Raeburn," continued Mr. Wilde, "fell, in my case, upon ears prepared for them; and my suspicions ripened to certainty when you came to me with the news of Miss Floyd's second seizure. I felt convinced that there was some evil agency at work, not resident in her own constitution,

and I recognised the agent in Mrs. Raeburn. You remember how I bade you watch that woman, under pretence of convincing ourselves that Miss Floyd received sufficient attention at her hands; whereas I really feared lest her hostess should pay her a too assiduous service. In particular, my suspicion was—and it has been confirmed—that Mrs. Raeburn prepared her meals.”

“That very idea crossed my own mind!” exclaimed I, excitedly; “yet, when I expressed it to yourself this afternoon, you positively affirmed it to be groundless.”

“You asked me if anyone was being poisoned, Sheddon,” answered my companion gravely, “and I told you that that was not the case; nor was it so. If it had been so, I should have discovered it long ago. Neither I, however, nor the doctor from London, whom, as you know, I compelled them to send for, could come to any definite conclusion on the matter. We knew only that the patient was growing worse and worse without any adequate cause. The tests which I applied, with the view of discovering the precise nature of the disease, all failed. Then I read again every work that bore upon the subject of irritant poisons; and among them I read this book.”

Here he took down a small volume of some antiquity from the bookshelf, and opened it at a place which he had marked.

“This is a scientific treatise upon Toxicology, written too long ago to be of much service, but it contains an appendix which will never grow out of date, since its contents are obtained direct from the great storehouse of human nature. The author narrates in it certain professional experiences of his own, one of which has an especial interest for ourselves at this moment. He describes how a certain person attempted the life of a rich man by ‘chopping horsehair exceedingly small and mixing it with his food.’ You see now that this has been the device pursued with respect to poor Miss Floyd. I myself only realised it a few hours ago, when your mention of having seen Mrs. Raeburn taking the horsehair out of the sofa at once reminded me of this anecdote, and placed me on the right track. Yonder piece of chicken, part of what was intended for Miss Floyd’s mid-day meal, was sprinkled with horsehair, as my microscope revealed. She was sleeping when I took it from her room, into which I had just seen it taken by Mrs. Raeburn’s hands. If further proof were needed, here is horsehair upon the very instrument itself, with respect to which

long impunity has, doubtless, made her careless. The hand of constant crime, like that of labour, loses its ‘dainty sense.’”

Thus spoke Mr. Wilde, with all the calmness of one pursuing a philosophical investigation, while horror seemed to be freezing the very marrow of my bones. His own nature was stirred to its very depths with indignation, but, as he afterwards explained to me, he feigned this stoical calm for my own sake, for my nerves, already shattered by the events of the past night, were in no state for the reception of such a piece of intelligence, though it was impossible for him to avoid making me his confidant.

“Why do we lose time?” cried I, rousing myself with an effort, as from some hideous dream, and springing to my feet. “Why not warn Gertrude at once? Why not arrest this wicked woman?”

“For many reasons, my good lad,” was the quiet reply, “but mainly for Gertrude’s sake. Should she come to know, in her present condition, that she has been tended for months by one who, in the person of her friend and hostess, was dooming her to death, the shock might destroy her altogether. Do not suppose that I am indifferent to your distress and anxiety,” continued my companion, laying his hand upon my shoulder, and speaking very kindly; “my solicitude for this dear young lady is second only to your own. Have confidence in me as heretofore, and, believe me, all shall be well. For the present, Miss Floyd is safe, and in a few minutes one will be here in whom I have implicit trust, and who will henceforth take her in sole charge. There is the door-bell; she is here.”

A middle-aged, grave-looking woman, whom Mr. Wilde addressed as Mrs. Hopkins, was presently ushered into the room.

“The situation,” said he, “of which I told you as likely to offer itself is now at your service. You have made the preparations of which I wrote, and are ready to accept it?”

“At once, sir.”

“This is a rare and valuable specimen of womankind, Harry,” observed the doctor, smiling, “who never uses four words when three will do. Go downstairs, Mrs. Hopkins, for five minutes, and then I will give you your instructions.”

When the nurse was gone the doctor sat down and wrote a letter, during which I waited very impatiently, for it seemed to me monstrous that he should waste time in correspondence at such a crisis.

"Whom on earth are you writing to, Mr. Wilde?" inquired I at last.

"To Mrs. Raeburn."

"To Mrs. Raeburn!" echoed I, almost as much disgusted as surprised. "How is it possible you can do that?"

"It is a mere act of civility, Sheddon. I am about to return her this chopping-machine, by favour of Mrs. Hopkins, a hospital nurse, who will be henceforth placed in sole charge of my patient, Miss Gertrude Floyd. Mrs. Raeburn is far too clever not to appreciate, at once, the entire situation; but I have added a hint to the effect that she must leave this place within twenty-four hours. I do not spare her on her own account, you may be sure; but there is no middle course between this method of proceeding and the calling in of the police, which would mean ruin and shame to the innocent as well as the guilty. And now, my lad, do you go back home with an easy mind, for it is just as well that you should be at the Priory when Mrs. Hopkins arrives there, to see what comes of it."

"But what will come of it?" inquired I, anxiously. "I mean as respects Mrs. Raeburn?"

"That is her look-out," answered Mr. Wilde, sternly. "Within the next twenty-four hours her fate is in her own hands; after that, if she has not complied with my demand, she must take the consequences. Stop! there is one thing more, Sheddon, in which I shall have to trust to your discretion. If Miss Floyd requires professional aid, you will of course at once send for me; but if Mrs. Raeburn should need a doctor, let some one else be sent for. Do you understand?"

I nodded, thinking in my simplicity that his meaning was that his indignation against this woman was such that he could not trust himself even to minister professionally to her needs; then, throwing my cloak about me, I ran home by the shortest way.

THE HAND AND THE MASTER-FINGER.

THE hand, most eloquent of the body's silent members, stands man in good stead when trumpeter tongue is mute. "By the motion of the right hand," says quaint old Holme, "we crave silence; by clapping hands we express joy and gladness, and that we are well pleased with what is done; by laying the hand upon the breast

we show a truth and earnestness to be in us; by striking our hand upon the thigh we tell we are moved with admiration; by striking the breast with the fist we give token of sorrow and repentance; by erecting and shaking of the right hand aloft military persons notify any prosperous success; by a beck of the hand we call a person to us; by pointing out with the fingers we give directions; by stretching out the hand 'gripped' we show we are filled with wrath and fury, and threaten revenge; we bless or curse by a lifting up of the hands; and by laying the right hand upon the Book oblige ourselves, by a solemn oath, to declare the truth."

In Morocco the number "five" is never mentioned in the Sultan's presence, because five is the number of the fingers of the hand; and the hand, as the wielder of sceptre, sword, and pen should be, is the symbol of authority all the world over. This gives a meaning to the custom of saluting a ruler's hand by way of homage, and no courtly ceremony can boast a greater antiquity than that of kissing hands. Priam, supplicating Achilles to restore the body of Hector, calls himself the most miserable of men in being forced to kneel before the murderer of his children, and kiss the hand yet reeking with their blood. Roman soldiers kissed the hand of their generals; consuls, tribunes, and dictators permitted a favoured few to pay them the same mark of respect. Under the emperors, kissing the imperial hand was held an essential duty, on the part of courtiers of high rank; and, taking a leaf out of the Pagan's book, as was too much their habit, the bishops of the early Christian Church gave their hands to the lips of inferior ministers. The wearers of the triple crown were content with being honoured in the same fashion, until one of the Leos, not caring to exhibit a mutilated hand, substituted his foot, and no one daring to protest against the innovation, his successors were careful not to resort to the less abject ceremony. It may be doubted if any Pope would have persuaded Cardinal John of Lorraine to kiss his toe. When the Duchess of Savoy proffered her fair fingers to that lip-loving churchman, he declined the favour with disdain, declaring he was accustomed to make free with the lips of the greatest queen in the world, and was not going to do less by a dirty little duchess; then, seizing the astonished lady by the waist, the bold cardinal, spite of struggles and perturba-

tions, kissed her thrice upon the mouth. With equal disregard for etiquette, but with more simplicity, did the country dames, to whom Charles the Second presented his hand, put up their lips for the king to kiss, a breach of custom the Merry Monarch readily forgave; forgave, we may be sure, with more sincerity than James the First forgave Sir Henry Yelverton for speaking disrespectfully of his countrymen, when, in token of pardon, he allowed the indiscreet orator to kiss his royal hand thrice ere he left the presence. Kissers at court are, we believe, forbidden to appear with their hands gloved. It was not always so, for in a letter dated 1625 we read: "This day my Lord Coke, with his gloves on, touched and kissed the king's hand, but whether to be confirmed a councillor or cashiered, I cannot yet learn." From kissing hands at court came kissing hands in courting, a practice the learned Selden considered as foolish as to eat the paring of an apple when one might taste the fruit itself; and from kissing hands for love came kissing hands for politeness' sake, and the use of the phrase, "I kiss your hand," as a salutation upon leave-taking, without a thought of suiting the action to the word.

A story is told of an old laird, who, being presented to George the Fourth at a levee, in his ignorance and anxiety to get through the business, ignored the hand extended to him, and, with a hasty bow, edged towards the door with all speed. Brought up by Lord Erroll's whispered reminder, "Kiss hands! kiss hands!" the startled old gentleman, facing about, kissed both his hands at the king, as if waiving a cordial recognition to a friend at a distance. All unconsciously, the laird was acting according to ancient rule, for only the greater subjects of the later Cæsars were permitted to press their lips upon imperial fingers. Inferior folks kissed their own hands, as they were wont to do upon entering the temples of the gods; a custom Pliny set down among those which were followed for no known reason but their antiquity. This sort of finger flattery was not unknown in England. Spenser describes a brave and rightful courtier as one who,

Unto all doth yield due courtesy,
But not with kissed hand below the knee,
As that same April crew are wont to do.

When Grumio arrives home with the news that Petruchio and his bride are near at hand, he says, "Call forth Nathaniel,

Joseph, Nicholas, Philip, Walter, Sugar-sop, and the rest. Let their heads be sleekly combed, their blue coats brushed, and their garters of an indifferent knit: let them curtsy with their left legs, and not presume to touch a hair of my master's horse-tail till they kiss their hands!" In one form or another kissing hands, in respect to sovereigns and superiors, is practised in so many parts of the world, finding equal favour with the savage as with the civilised, that it may be said to be all but universal.

"Who is he that will strike hands with me?" asks Job. "A man void of understanding strikes hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friends," saith the wise king of Israel. In this old-world custom of striking hands, hand-shaking, no doubt, originated, for, before it became a mere friendly greeting, a shake of the hand was accepted as a pledge. When Ferdinand and Miranda strike their tender bargain, he says, "Here is my hand," and she replies, "And mine with my heart on it." Dunbar, Lord Treasurer of Scotland, congratulating Yelverton upon having made his peace at court, said to him, "I will desire your friendship, as you do mine, and I will promise to do you my best; whereupon as pledge I give you my hand!" And so, shaking Yelverton by the hand, he bade him farewell. Nowadays, a shake of the hand may mean very much, or nothing at all. The strong, hearty grip for grip of two old, long-parted friends, meeting unexpectedly, is one thing; the nerveless, loose, indifferent clasp of acquaintanceship another. Sydney Smith attempted to classify hand-shakes, dividing them into the high official, the sepulchral, the digitary, the shakus rusticus, and the retentive. The first was practised by the then Archbishop of York, "who kept his body erect, carried your hand aloft to a level with his chin, and gave it a rapid, short shake." Sir John Mackintosh affected the sepulchral, "laying his open hand flat on your palm, so coldly, you were hardly aware of its contiguity." The digitary—in favour with the high clergy—was adopted by Brougham, who used to put forth his forefinger with, "How arre you?" The shakus rusticus was having "your hand seized as in an iron grasp, betokening rude health, a warm heart, and distance from the Metropolis, but producing a sense of relief when your hand is released with the fingers unbroken." The retentive shake being that

"which, beginning with vigour, pauses, as it were, to take breath, but without relinquishing its prey, and before you are aware begins again, till you are anxious as to the result, and have no shake left in you." The witty canon might have added to his list by going a little farther afield—say to California or Norway—which, having nothing else in common, are both tremendous countries for hand-shaking. Of the latter a writer says, "If you give your curricule-boy a few shillings, he at once shakes hands; if you hold out an oat-cake to a beggar, he will employ the same token of friendship; even a gipsy-woman, who is accommodated merely with an ember to light her pipe from, will fervently grasp your hand in thanks." The simple, good-natured peasants of Co-burg acknowledge a favour in the same way. When the Queen paid her first visit to the duchy, she tells us that, while sketching in a field, "One or two of the women, who were making hay, came close to me, and said, as all the country people do here, 'Guten abend' ('Good even'), and, upon my replying something about the weather, one of them began to talk. She had two little children with her; I gave her some money, and she shook my hand for it."

If there be anything in chiromancy, every man may be said to carry his life in his hand, since he can read in its lines all that has happened, and is to happen, to him; while the adept in chiromancy, if he has not his destiny at his fingers' ends, can, by taking note of their shape, find out what nature designed him for, and shape his course accordingly, and, by so doing, show himself as wise as the ancient physicians who were careful to use only the fourth finger in mixing their medicines, in the faith that if it came in contact with anything hurtful to human health, it would signify the same to the heart of the mixer. To this fanciful nervous connection between the heart and the fourth finger, the latter is said to owe its being chosen to bear the golden circlet of marriage. This distinction, however, it has not always enjoyed. Some have assumed that the thumb-ring was an emblem of widowhood, whereas it was the sign of wifehood. In one of his controversial pamphlets, Milton says of an opponent: "He sets one out half a dozen phthisical mottoes, hopping short in the measure of convulsive fits, in which labour the agony of his mind having escaped narrowly, instead of well-sized

periods, he greets us with a quantity of thumb-ring posies." That these posied thumb-rings were wedding-rings is shown by Butler charging the Puritans with wishing to abolish the tool with which the bridegroom was married to a thumb; and Tom d'Urfey, when describing a rapid act of courtship, writes:

Ere three days about were come,
The ring was put upon the thumb.

In old days, the thumb received the ring as the bridegroom promised to endow the bride with all his worldly goods; and, after passing successively to the second and third fingers, when "Amen" was pronounced, it rested on the fourth finger, to be replaced upon the thumb at the end of the ceremony. Upon the master-finger ladies wore their wedding-rings down to the time of George the First, following aldermanic fashion. "When I was about thy years, Hal," says Sir John, "I was not an eagle's talon in the waist; I could have crept into any alderman's thumb-ring." It was upon her thumb, too, that Chaucer's Canace placed the magic ring, enabling her to hold commune with the birds, and to divine the hidden virtues of every plant that grew.

The thumb was certainly the fittest bearer of matrimony's badge, seeing that oaths ratified by it were held irrevocable. Once upon a time a northern princess took the veil, before it was discovered that state policy required she should become a wife. A dispensation was obtained, but, unlike the positive maiden in the song, the princess was determined she would be a nun; and, when threatened with force, placed her right thumb upon a sword-blade, and swore she would marry no man. She had her way, for not even the Pope could overcome that oath. The phrase, "under my hand and seal," ought, perhaps, to run, "under my thumb and seal;" for Ducange tells us that, in the middle ages, the pressure of the thumb upon the wax was the usual form of ratifying important documents—a statement borne out by a verse of an Elizabethan love ditty:

I thank you, Doron, and will think on you;
I love you, Doron, and will wink on you;
I seal your charter-patent with my thumbs,
Come, kiss and part, for fear my mother comes!

"We may lick thoorns upo' that!" says an Ulster man in token of agreement; and the old custom, common to the ancient Iberians and the Goths, and in vogue among

modern Moors, of completing a bargain by the licking and joining of thumbs, was not extinct in Scotland when Erskine wrote his Institutes. Decrees are yet in existence, sustaining sales upon the ground that the parties concerned had licked thumbs. This mode of binding an agreement was used to strange purposes in 1642. Serjeant Kyle, of Sir James Montgomery's regiment, having some words with Lieutenant Baird, threw down his glove by way of challenge. Baird having no glove handy wherewith to answer the gage, licked his thumb and said, "There is my parole for it." "When?" asked Kyle. "Presently," was the reply. Kyle slipped out of the house. Baird followed, with his sword drawn, and in five minutes was a dead man. Another thumb-licking device, fraught with less fatal consequences, but apt, nevertheless, to lay lovers of big bumpers down among the dead men, was that called "drinking super-nagulum." The drinker, after emptying his cup, turned it bottom upwards, and with a filip sent the last drop upon his thumb-nail, and then licked it off. If the drop proved too big and ran off the nail, he was held to have shirked his liquor and had to drink a second bumper by way of penance. According to Lamb, the art of broiling, and the virtues of roast pig, might have remained for ever unknown, had not Bobo burned his fingers, and licked them to soothe the pain. A similar accident proved a lucky one to the Irish hero, Fingal. He served a giant, who, after persevering for seven years, at last succeeded in hooking and landing a salmon possessing the property of communicating the gift of prevision to the mortal who ate the first mouthful of it. To cook this wonderful fish was Fingal's task. Omitting to turn it at the proper time, a blister rose on its side; he, in affright, pressing it down with his thumb, of course got burned; and equally, of course, put his thumb into his mouth, fortunately with a bit of salmon attached to it. The power his master had toiled so long to win was Fingal's, and he wisely quitted his service without giving notice. The angry giant was not long in following the runaway, but it was a hopeless chase, for, whenever Fingal felt a pain in his thumb, he became aware of danger at hand, and learned the way out of it directly he put his thumb to his mouth; and this useful quality Fingal's thumb retained ever afterwards.

Conrad, Lord of Wolfenstein, smiting

Dickon Draw-the-Sword with his gauntlet, that worthy "right little said, but bit his glove and shook his head." A fortnight later, and Conrad's corpse was found in Inglewood:

Unknown the manner of his death,
Gone was his brand, both sword and sheath;
But ever from that time 'twas said,
That Dickon wore a Cologne blade.

Scott — whose habit of writing notes to his works might be advantageously imitated by the poets of the present day — says that to bite the glove or the thumb was a Border pledge of mortal revenge; and in illustration relates how a young Teviotdale laird, upon discovering on the morrow of a hard drinking bout that his glove had been bitten, insisted upon knowing with whom he had quarrelled, as he must have satisfaction, although he remembered nothing at all about the matter. His curiosity was gratified, and he fell, as he deserved to do, in the duel. In England thumb-biting was practised to goad an adversary into fighting. Dekker tells us that St. Paul's Walk was notable for shoulderings, jeerings, and biting of thumbs to beget quarrels; and Shakespeare imports the fashion into Verona. When Gregory and Sampson espy two Montague men, out fly their swords; but prudent Sampson, to compel the others to take the initiative, bites his thumb at them, "which is a disgrace if they bear it." Challenged with the question, "Did you bite your thumb at me, sir?" he replies, "No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite my thumb!" and in a few minutes the fray begins. It was not absolutely necessary to put the thumb to the mouth. In 1291 a rude fellow was sent to prison for casting vile contempt upon the clerk of the Sheriff of London, by raising his thumb and saying, "Iphurt, Iphurt!" "in manifest contempt of our lord the king."

If one Neapolitan wishes to anger another, he places the palm of the right hand on the back of the left and shakes the crossed thumbs, symbolical of donkey's ears, at him; a pleasant bit of pantomime answering to the "taking a sight" popular elsewhere — a sign of contemptuous defiance, said to be at least as old as ancient Assyria. At any rate, it is as old as Rabelais, who thus describes Panurge receiving Thaumaste:—"Panurge suddenly lifted up in the air his right hand and put the thumb thereof into the nostril of the same side, holding his four fingers straight out and closed orderly in a parallel line to

the point of his nose, shutting the left eye wholly, and making the other wink with profound depression of the eyebrows and eyelids. Then lifted he up his left hand, with hard wringing and stretching forth of his four fingers, and elevating his thumb, which he held in a line directly correspondent to the situation of his right hand, with the distance of a cubit and a half between them. This done, in the same form he abased towards the ground both the one and the other hand. Lastly, he held them in the midst, as aiming at the Englishman's nose." Bon Gaultier's line, "Coffee-milling, care and sorrow, with a nose-adapted thumb," is explained by "Jabez," in Notes and Queries, as having reference to another way of taking a sight, on which the closed right hand was made to revolve round the little finger of the left. He laments that the degenerate schoolboy of our day only takes a modified sight, consisting of the right hand locked, with the first finger applied to the nose and the thumb to the chin. The change is to be deplored, but the new method is as effectually provocative of a row as the old, and what more does a boy want?

A maimed thumb sufficed to exempt a Roman from military service. A certain knight, being of Norval's opinion, that sons were best kept at home, cut off his children's thumbs; a cruel kindness, for which Augustus confiscated the fond father's property. Norman barons were given to hanging men and women up by their thumbs; a mode of torture the Spaniards improved upon by inventing the thumbscrew, for the special benefit of heretics. In mediæval England, secretaries found guilty of forging or falsifying deeds were liable to lose both thumbs; while to draw a sword upon an alderman of the city of London involved the cutting off of the offender's right hand. By an Act of Philip and Mary, authors, printers, and publishers of seditious writings were visited with the same barbarous punishment, and, although some lawyers contended that the Act was a temporary one, and died with Mary, it was put in force, in her sister's reign, against John Stubbs and his publisher, in Westminster market-place; Stubbs, as soon as the executioner had done his work, pulling off his hat with his left hand and shouting "God save the Queen!" A similar penalty, preliminary to a harder one yet, followed violent contempt of court to a much later date. Pepys records an instance in what he terms "a good

story" of a prisoner flinging a stone at the judge, "while they were considering to transport him to save his life." The secretary's good story is set down in the legal jargon of the time, in Chief Justice Ireby's "Notes to Dyer's Reports," and, serious as is the matter, the manner of reporting it is so comical that we cannot forbear quoting it. "Richardson, Ch. Just. de C. Bench. al Assises at Salisbury, in isummer 1631, fuit assault per prisoner la condemna pur felony; que puis son condemnation ject un brickbat a le dit Justice, qui narrowly mist; et pur ces immediately fuit indictment drawn, per Noy, envers le prisoner, et son dexter manus ampute, and fix at gibbet, sur qui luy meme immediatement hange in presence de court."

At this time the hand of an executed man readily fetched ten guineas, being held as efficacious in working cures, as the holy bones of the saintliest of saints. Hangmen added to their income by taking money from persons desirous of receiving the dead-stroke; and it is still an article of popular faith in some parts of England, that a swollen neck may be reduced to its normal proportions by simply striking it three times with the hand of a man who has been hanged, but the operation ought to be performed before the criminal is cut down. Practisers of forbidden arts turned the hand of a dead murderer to much worse purpose, rendering it, by sundry incantations, the burglar's best companion, providing the proprietor made a candlestick of it, and was not plagued with as bad a memory as the unlucky Cassim Baba, making him forget the "charm" at the critical moment. Of this charm there are several versions, none possibly more effectual than Ingoldsby's:

Now open lock
To the Dead Man's knock!
Fly bolt, and bar, and band!
Nor move, nor swerve,
Joint, muscle, or nerve,
At the spell of the Dead Man's hand!
Sleep all who sleep—wake all who wake,
But be as the dead, for the Dead Man's sake!

The "hand of glory," as it was called, was in use so lately as 1801, for in that year some thieves, in their hurry to get away from a house at Loughcrew, in Meath, left one, candle and all, behind them. A dead hand was also supposed to be an unerring guide to hidden treasure. Dousterswivel, enlightening Oldbuck on the virtues of the Hand of Glory, says: "It is a hand cut off from a man as has been hanged for murder, and dried very

nice in de shmoke of juniper; and if you put a little of what you call yew wid your juniper it will not be any better—that is, it will not be no worse. Then you take something of de fatch of de bear, and of de badger, and of de little sucking child as has not been christened, and you do make a candle and put it in de Hand of Glory at de proper hour and minute, wid de proper ceremonish; and he who seeketh for treasure shall never find none at all."

Dead murderers' hands not being always obtainable when wanted, the disciples of Voodoo obviate the difficulty, by investing the hand of any mortal coming to an untimely end with the desired power. Some twelvemonths ago a Mobile negro, after murdering a man, cut off his victim's hand and treated it with quicksilver and chloroform to stay decomposition, in the belief that so long as he carried it about him, he was not only safe from discovery, but could enter a room in which a man lay sleeping, and strip it of its movables without disturbing the occupant. The horrid talisman, however, proved his ruin, helping to convince a jury he was guilty of "murder in the first degree," a crime entailing imprisonment for life. This interesting sample of black humanity achieved his dead hand himself. Touchet, Lord Audley, had his thrust upon him when unhappy Philip Thicknesse, by his last will and testament, directed that, as soon as the breath was out of his body, his right hand should be cut off and sent to Lord Audley, that the sight of it might recall to his duty to God one who had forgotten his duty to his sire. Not so easy to comprehend is the purpose of the strange clause in the will of the late Countess of London: "I further wish my right hand to be cut off and buried in the park at Donnington, at the bend of the hill to the Trent, and a small cross over it, with the motto, 'I hyde my time!'" The lady's instructions have been carried out to the letter. Certainly they were too clear to allow of non-fulfilment on the plea of want of preciseness, a plea that might have been raised by the pupil of the old violinist of Villedieu-sur-Seine, who promised his dying teacher not to allow his hand to be separated from his beloved Guarnerius, and to destroy the latter. Puzzled how to do the one without doing the other, the fiddler's friend could find no better way of keeping his promise than to cut off the violinist's hand at the wrist, and throw it, with the instrument clasped in its rigid fingers, into the Seine,

to be fished up by the police, whose minds were much exercised to account for such a strange find, until the young fellow made clean breast of it and set all suspicion of foul play at rest.

COALS IN THE POOL.

LIKE the rest of London, the silent highway has greatly changed. Gone are the tall, rickety wooden buildings—blackened with age—that gave, according to taste, a tumble-down or a romantic air to waterside scenery. Gone are the wide stretches of mud which adorned the neighbourhood of Hungerford-market; and gone also are the mudlarks, who were wont to disport themselves in their native element, and dive therein for coppers, to the delight of a large and miscellaneous audience. Gone are the tenants of the dry arches of Waterloo-bridge, swept away by ruthless embankment builders. The jolly young waterman, too, is nearly gone. The trim-built wherry does not pay so well as working on a steamer; Chelsea ferry is played out; and Tom Tag, instead of taking a "spell" himself, is carefully looked after by School Board myrmidons, lest his little ones should miss that ceremony. How many Londoners could find Whitehall-stairs? and where, oh! where, is Hungerford-market itself, with its everlasting fish-shops, its myriads of rabbits, its penny ices, and the hobbledehoy and hoydens who used to devour them by the dozen on Sunday evenings, without particular reference to the state of the thermometer? Where are the "gaufres" of my youth? What has become of waterside tavern life, and of that peculiar style of refreshment which required a wooden gallery in the open air, and a rowing-match going on somewhere near, to give a proper flavour to the shrimps, the crusty loaves and butter, the periwinkles and watercresses, the tea and mild ale, the heavy wet, the hot rum and water with lemon in it, and the shag tobacco smoked out of "churchwarden" pipes by a bygone generation? In a pleasantly fraternal way the old inn overhung the river with a kind of "extension" building, excellently well fitted for the discussion of the before-mentioned delicacies, and for salt-water yarns of "admirals of high renown," arctic voyages, and eke for tales of the "blackbird" trade, and anecdotes of opium clippers. They are gone now, these rickety old shanties, with their convenient trap-doors looking down on the

water, their wealth of bandanna handkerchiefs, their singularly excellent Hollands, and choice plng tobacco. Luckily, Mr. Tissot was just in time to catch one or two of them, and transfer them to his faithful canvas, before they went altogether. I am told that we are now to have open-air cafés on the Embankment—handsome, Frenchy, gilded places, with little round tables, where, I suppose, people will go to enjoy cigarettes and Apollinaris water, in place of the prime old Jamaica, the choice Geneva, and the full-flavoured Virginia of their forefathers. Shade of Dogget! shall thy immortal rowing-match from Swan to Swan ever come to be gazed upon by drinkers of lemonade, and players at dominoes? Who knows?

In the ancient days, nearly a quarter of a century ago, when Hungerford-market and Fox-under-the-Hill were yet extant, the coalwhipper loomed large among the riverside population. A burly fellow this; a hearty and a strong; a mighty consumer of heavy wet, and given to hitting out straight from the shoulder at times, but companionable enough in his cups, as was testified to by the quiet foreign gentleman, who, loving beer, especially "portare," and fancying that he got it better at the Fox-under-the-Hill than anywhere else, frequented, for many months, the haunt of the "coalies," and not being acquainted with the English language, fraternised agreeably with the natives in dumb show—a proof, if any were wanted, that your true drinker can get on excessively well without conversation, provided the liquor be sound and plentiful. In the days referred to, the ships yclept "colliers," which brought coal into the Thames, were commonly old brigs, superannuated from regular work, but considered good enough to carry coals. Their age was marvellous—fifty, sixty, and a hundred years old, were common enough. Among these veterans were famous ships which had sailed round and round the world, carrying bold discoverers; dashing merchant captains, smart enough to dodge the Channel privateers; and less scrupulous, but not less smart, runners of "ebony"—black as their later cargo of carbon. To the complexion of a collier they had come at last, and performed their voyage between Newcastle and London with greater or less punctuality—generally less—until, in the fulness of time, Davy Jones waxed impatient, and engulfed his sturdy prey

beneath the wild grey waters of the North Sea. The old colliers came high up the river to London and Southwark bridges, and were there handed over to the coal-whippers, who unladed the coals into barges and lighters, which, together with the wharfs of numerous coal merchants then occupying the site of the present embankment, gave a generally inky aspect to the riverside—very different from the clean, handsome shore which makes London, when looked at northward, across the Thames, one of the handsomest, if not absolutely the handsomest city in Europe. Colliers, coalwhippers, and weighing-machines have moved lower down the river, to Limehouse; and, in point of fact, the great bulk of the work of unlading, or rather translading, coal in the Thames is done lower down still, on those huge black monsters fast-moored in the Reach, sacred to the name of Bugsby, whoever he may have been. When I say the great bulk of the translading takes place on these enormous edifices, I am not romancing, for Messrs. W. Cory and Son, the proprietors of the "derricks," as these huge rafts are called, unload at them from one million and a quarter to one million and a half tons, out of the two and three quarter million tons of seaborne coal annually imported into London.

Readers of ALL THE YEAR ROUND are possibly aware that the largest proportion of the best Wallsend coal comes to London by sea; and it may, perhaps, be known to them that the term "Wallsend," although retained in commerce, no longer indicates the spot whence comes the best house coal. It was once no misnomer. In days long since gone by, the finest coal was drawn from that spot where the old Roman wall comes to an end; but these old pits have been disused for many years, and are filled with water, while the name Wallsend has been applied to the produce of other collieries. It must not, however, be supposed that the name is used indiscriminately. It may be so abused by not over-scrupulous dealers, but, "in the trade," it is restricted to the produce of the following collieries: Hetton, South Hetton, Haswell, Lambtons, Original Hartlepool, and Tees. To no other species of coal is the term "Best Wallsend" applied by the trade; and, when any other coals but those just specified are labelled Best Wallsend by retail dealers, the public are justified in concluding that this is done to mislead and confuse, if not to absolutely cheat, them. In the Metro-

polis it is clearly to the interest of a coal merchant to call his coals Wallsend, as no species of coal fetches so high a price in the London market, although very excellent fuel comes from other places than Durham. From Yorkshire, from the great Silkstone seam, tapped in various places, come the Newton-Chambers, the Coopers, and the Sharlston coals—known in town as the Best Inland; while the fine coal known as Derby Bright is raised in the neighbouring county. These facts are by no means unworthy the consideration of the metropolitan consumer, if only as a preservative against the panics to which the London market has shown itself peculiarly susceptible. Let but the Londoner hear of strikes in South Wales, or in Lancashire, and he straightway trembles at the possible return of a coal famine, and, by rushing into the market to secure himself, contributes to bring about the very result he is anxious to avert. This sensitiveness of the London market is peculiar to itself, and is not to be explained in any other way, than by the ignorance of the great body of consumers concerning the native land of their coals. Let them, therefore, be of good cheer so long as Durham, Yorkshire, and Derbyshire are free from strikes, for no disturbances in other districts will produce more than a slight effect on the London market, unless the natural course of business is accelerated by a panic. It is hardly necessary to say that Yorkshire and Derbyshire coal is brought to London by railway, and that, until lately, a small proportion of Wallsend also came by the same route. During the last few years, however, the swift steam-colliers—fine iron screw-steamers of from eight hundred to a thousand tons burden, which have superseded the ancient square-rigged wooden ships—have completely beaten the railways as coal-carriers from the great northern coal-field. By rail, it costs for railway dues, truck hire, and the like, some eleven or twelve shillings to bring a ton of coals from the pit's mouth, in Durham, to King's Cross; while seven shillings, or seven and sixpence, represent the average difference between the price at the pit and at the ship's side in the Thames. Thus, when Lambtons or Hettons are to be bought on the spot for fourteen shillings the ton, it may be calculated that they will fetch, under ordinary circumstances, from a guinea to twenty-two shillings in the Thames, and will cost the actual consumer about thirty or thirty-one shillings,

screened and delivered in his own cellar. Importers of coal by railway find it exceedingly difficult to compete with these rates, but there are yet little mysteries of trade which ease their position in a certain degree. For instance, a ton of Wallsend, at the ship's side in the Thames, means the statute ton of twenty hundredweight; while the ton of coal loaded into railway trucks, on the siding of a Durham colliery, means twenty-one hundredweight. This is not all the advantage possessed by the railway coal merchant, for he saves a heavy percentage by getting his coal in large merchantable pieces, requiring little or no screening, and involving no loss on the "small." For a long while these counterbalancing advantages enabled the railway importers to make a hard fight of it; but it would seem that water-carriage has, in this case, at last carried the day. In every possible way time is economised in the management of the vast fleet of steam-colliers, now running between London and the North. There is no rest for the steam-collier, for on the number of voyages she can perform per annum depends the percentage of profit she returns to her proprietor or proprietors; for it is by no means unusual for great merchants, like Messrs. Cory and Son, to go halves in a fleet of ships with a colliery owner—an arrangement which has been found highly beneficial "all round;" for the colliery owner loads the ship and despatches her at once, and the consignees are equally brisk in unloading, and sending her back for a fresh cargo. It is said that a screw-collier, carrying a thousand tons in her hold, has been laden, at Sunderland, in little over three hours. As certain ancient voyagers remark, "I do not know, for I have not seen it;" but I have seen sail empty away down the Thames, at three o'clock in the afternoon, a stately ship which had only arrived at one o'clock in the morning, deep-laden with best Wallsend. As whole, or part owners, the firm above referred to are interested in about forty iron steam screw-colliers, and possess, on their own account, over four hundred coal barges, seven steam-tugs for towing the same, and a couple of derricks, at which from thirty to forty shiploads of coal, amounting in the aggregate to some thirty thousand tons, are translated weekly.

These derricks are well worthy of inspection, and Atlas No. 1, as it is now called, affords an excellent instance of the curious habit of English institutions, of

floundering from failure to success. Not that the derrick, in its original form, could be regarded as a purely English structure, although it was ugly enough to be intensely national. If I am not mistaken, the idea of a derrick originated in the fertile brain of an American, in whose country derricks of various kinds have long been in use for lifting weights, raising wrecks, and similar purposes. In 1859 it was determined that this country should also have a derrick, and the "subject of the present memoir" was built by the Thames Iron Shipbuilding Company, at Blackwall. As originally constructed, it consisted of a flat-bottomed vessel, two hundred and seventy feet long and ninety feet across the beam. It was divided throughout into a number of water-tight compartments, which could be filled with water, so as to counterbalance a weight on the opposite side. Practically, the derrick was an immense floating steam-crane. From the deck rose an iron tripod, eighty feet high, on the top of which revolved a gigantic boom a hundred and twenty feet long, and above the boom rose the "king post," a continuation of the tripod. This terrible-looking machine was fitted with steam-engines and tremendous tackle for raising sunken ships, and could be propelled at the rate of four miles an hour. The writer recollects it very well, with its Tyburn look, as it lay moored off Execution Dock, and had horrid dreams—after partaking only thrice of whitebait, not to mention salmon, roast duck, beans and bacon, and cold gooseberry tart—about its raising the sunken ships of dead and gone pirates, and hanging their skeletons all in row on its giant yard-arm. It did not raise much, however—not even the wind. Whether the machinery would not work, or ships left off sinking within a thousand miles of the derrick, I know not, but the concern was wound up, if the ships were not, and the famous locker, buried in the sea depths, remained unrifled.

In the hands of Messrs. Cory, the hitherto luckless derrick was turned to admirable use. From a despairing yard-arm going about pretending it could lift ships, it was turned into a practical unloader of coals. When we consider how important an element is time in all modern affairs, we at once see the value of gigantic machinery for transferring cargo. On the original derrick, and on one subsequently built on the Tyne and towed round to the Thames, are found every necessary appliance for shifting coal

rapidly from the steam-collier to the attendant barge. Looked at from the river, the machine has an uncanny aspect. It is hideously black and huge. Great gaunt limbs are moving restlessly up and down, and whisking suddenly round like the legs of a giant blackbeetle chained down on its back and kicking wildly for freedom. On board all is busy life. The callipee of the great insect, turned upwards, is covered with miniature railways and countless trucks flying in all directions, but falling in with one symmetrical design. Overhead the limbs—hydraulic cranes of immense power, but docile as well-trained politicians—whirl round the iron buckets of coal and deposit them in the shoots, at the will of the man who sits, like a railway pointsman, in his narrow box. On one side of the derrick lies, fast-moored, the steam-collier, while around her bows and stern cluster the funeral barges. Down dips the bucket into the hold, and presently emerges therefrom charged with coal. While being whirled through the air the weight of the bucketful—some three-quarters of a ton—is exactly registered by an ingenious instrument used to hard work, and not apt to get out of order, for its work is of a responsible kind. As the weight is taken and registered the registrar touches a bell, which advises the "tipper" that it is all right, and the bucket, now poised above a "shoot," pours its contents into that cunningly-devised piece of mechanism, which, screening the coals as they go, delivers them with the smallest possible breakage into the barge. When the derrick is in full blast, with every hydraulic crane at work, its deck is not a favourable spot for airing lavender kid gloves and snowy waistcoats. One treads upon coal dust. Coal is flying past on multitudinous trucks. Coal in tons is flying about in the air. One breathes an atmosphere of coal, and the adhesive dust clings to face, beard, and raiment with curious tenacity.

In its inner life the derrick is not less worthy of notice. Buried in the iron compartments is a complete engineer's shop, for repairing whatever tackle may chance to get out of gear. Once upon a time there was also a telegraphic apparatus, but the casualties to which ocean cables are subject proved to be as nothing, compared to those which befell the tiny submerged line between the derrick and the river shore. Small craft of all kinds help themselves in river navigation by dragging their anchors, which

duly brought up the cable—a small matter if it had been carefully unhitched and allowed to sink again; but minor skippers are not over particular, and the cable was so frequently cut that the private telegraph was given up in despair. Gas is made on board, and on a sufficiently large scale for all requirements—which is not saying a little, for, on the sable derrick, work goes on by night as by day. As a ship arrives she is laid-to, and the busy inhabitants of the great raft proceed to work their wicked will upon her. From the gas department below proceed pipes for illuminating the deck, and from them flexible tubes are conveyed on board the vessel to be unloaded. The hold to be emptied is as fully lighted as the derrick itself, and be there heat or cold, rain, or snow, or fog, the cranes whisk round and round through midnight hours as beneath the summer sun. Precious hours cannot be lost. The good ship, like an impatient racer, has no sooner completed one "heat," than a start is imperatively demanded for the next. She must be up and away to the North for a fresh cargo, and gas blazes and men toil in the dusty air that not a moment may be wasted. From thirty to thirty-five thousand feet of gas are consumed weekly—a quantity representing no small consumption of gas coal.

With that absorbent faculty displayed by great firms, Messrs. Cory have recently taken to building their own barges. Similar instances are not wanting in many of the great industries of England. When Bessemer steel first became a popular metal, the smelter bought his coal of the colliery proprietor, and his iron-ore from the mine owner, and produced his fine hæmatite and Bessemer pig-iron. This was then dealt with by the "converter," who made the pig-iron into Bessemer steel, and sold the ingots to one who reheated them, and turned them out as rails and tires for railway use. All this is changing rapidly. The great contractor owns his own coal mines, smelts his metal, runs it in its molten form straight into the "converter," and turns it out in rails without ever allowing it to cool, from the moment the iron-ore, flux, and fuel are piled in the blast furnace; or, like the great Palmer Company, takes coal and iron-ore, and never leaves them till there comes out an iron steamship. Messrs. Cory's barge-building yard is a notable establishment, turning out, at present, nearly one barge per week, besides doing much in

the way of repairing that roughly-used species of craft. It is quite a dockyard, on the scale of vessels carrying about ninety-five tons—a size demonstrated by experience as the most convenient for economising labour. To the uninitiated, the building of a coal-barge may appear a very rough, common piece of work; but this view is about as correct as the opinions of the uninitiated usually are. To the building of barges has been applied the system known as "diagonal;" first tried in the building of ships' boats. A barge is furnished with three skins. The outer one presents the ordinary appearance of planks laid lengthwise, but the two interior layers are diagonally opposed to each other, so as to produce a kind of diamond pattern, giving great elasticity and extraordinary powers of resistance to the craft. Various woods—English and American oak, elm, and pitch pine—enter into the composition of a barge, and there is a mighty sawing and steaming of planks into the required curves constantly going on. Rapid as is the production of barges at Messrs. Cory's yard, the demand fully keeps pace with the supply. This appears strange, as one would hardly expect coal-barges to wear out rapidly. The main reason appears to be the increase of business—due, in some measure, to the present tendency of trade to gravitate towards great houses, to the extinction of the smaller fry. In coals and wine, in "dry goods," and in beer, in farms, and in railways, fortune fights for the big purses, and leaves petty capitalists out in the cold. Whether this tendency of the age to abolish small proprietors, by converting a few of them into directors and managers, and reducing the remainder to clerkdom, be for the good of the world or not, is a question with which I will not undertake to deal just now. It will suffice to note the fact.

The growing wealth and population of London have played, perhaps, the principal part in the wonderful growth of the coal trade. Without citing ancient statistics, I may mention that, in the four years ending in 1872, the quantity of coal actually consumed in London increased by more than three-quarters of a million of tons, the total for 1872 being nearly six millions. Another curious fact is, that during the four years in question occurred not only the increase cited in gross consumption, but a very notable increase in the consumption per

head, and this in spite of the high prices which ruled towards the end of that period. Thus, in the year 1869, when coal was sold retail at about twenty-five or twenty-six shillings per ton, Londoners consumed twenty-seven hundredweight per head; and in the year 1872, when prices varied from thirty-six to fifty-two shillings per ton, they actually burnt twenty-nine hundredweight per head of population!—a convincing proof, if any were needed, that, despite the halo which surrounds the “good old times,” and the frantic shrieking of idle people with fixed incomes, the great bulk of the nation is getting better off every year.

THROUGH THE NIGHT.

A NOCTURN.

BENEATH thy window, gleaming white
From out the gloom of clustering leaves,
I stand, and in the hush of night
Dreamland lies open to my sight,

Unslumbering fancy weaves
What wondrous visions! Could I bid
Those eyes, on which each curv'd lid
Lies like a folded leaf,
Look forth, what should they see of all
That doth my spirit thrill and thrall
To tears which bode not grief?

I might not slumber, such delight
Of memory did move my breast.
The siren Silence wooed to thought,
And with Sleep's poppied fingers fought,
Whispering that waking dreams are best

When Love is Lord of Night.
Thy lattice lured me. Here I stand,
One dew-wet rose within my hand,
Plucked from the spray that nods beneath
Thy window, which methought thy breath
Kissed last at our last parting. Lo!
It wakes such visions as no wand
Of wizardry might show.

Night-shadows part, I see the land
Which only dreaming love may know.
There gleam through rifts of golden mist
Skies like calm seas of amethyst,
Where no clouds sail, save only those
Which are as drifts of vaporous rose,
And hide no heart of storm.

There thine entrancing form
Seems native as the flowers. Do gleams
From its rare glory gild thy dreams,
Sweet soul whom I would shrine
In fadeless splendour? Doth such light
Illume the mysteries of thy night
As makes a heaven of mine?

Dear! I would sing no idle song
To love's oft-fingered lute.
Better its chords were wholly mute,
Than touched to tones less sweet and strong
Than spirit-strains may suit.

A lay less pure than earth's first night,
Less passion-warm than June's best rose,
Should never bid those eyes unclose.
Yet list to mine! Ah! see, a light
Breaks in the east. Mysterious train
Of visions will ye yet remain
To make day beautiful? Amaranth bowers,
Strong-pinioned hopes, and puré powers,
Ripe bloom of blameless passion, lips
Stainless as blossoms, tearless eyes
Which know not shame's eclipse;

All shapes of dreaming love's delight,
Are ye but phantoms of the night?

Ah no!

All loveliest things are prophecies.
To strains, as sweet as low,
Of far-heard music moves my song.
List! for its tones to thee belong,
Its thoughts are all inspired by thee,
Dear lady of my dreams. Awake!
Look forth with dawn, and it shall take
More perfect melody.

THE RAJAH'S DIAMOND.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

WHEN I left the Diamond Fields, my friend Bate owned one of the best claims in Number Three Road, New Rush. He had rank among those happy ones who kept a pint measure of big gems in their tent. These he would display from time to time, smoothing out the brilliant heap upon his table. Ruefully he displayed them, remembering what fine prices he had refused for the very worst in days of pride, before the panic. At prices now offered, Bate declined, with unnecessary emphasis, to sell, and he was fond of consulting me, as a man who had travelled East and West, as to places where would be found a good opening for trifles of the sort. “About India, now, for that chap?” he would say, holding up a great “macle” stone, like a crystal inkstand. “Or China for the yellow boy? Or Mexico, Borneo, Timbuctoo?” I advised him to sell for what prices he could obtain, or, if not, to rely only on the Indian market. The first counsel he would not hear of; the second he put in practice, when he had made his fortune, and had enjoyed a winter's hunting in the Shires. Persons who connect themselves with diamonds early learn to hold their tongues, and I have no information as to Bate's success in disposing of his treasures to Maharsjah and Ranee, but I fancy it to have been satisfactory. He did not succeed, however, in clearing out his stock, and wandered farther East, towards China. We had often talked of Borneo, and on reaching Singapore it occurred to him to run over to Kuching. There is now an hotel in that secluded capital, and the residents showed their usual hospitality. At the end of three days an incident happened to him, which has happened to all other strangers on that coast, who presented the appearance of wealth.

One day, as he left the Treasury, where he had been calling, two Malays rose from beside the little bridge which spans the

ditch—a lovely ditch, as I remember it, bordered with pink lotus, overhung by scarlet garlands of the shoe-flower, and studded with velvety rosettes of pistia. They went up to him at once and salaamed. He stood to talk, having naught else to do, in the pathway leading to the Court House. One Malay was evidently of some rank. He wore shirt, sarong, and trowsers of silk, rather frayed; his turban was of Persian cloth, and the kris, thrust in his girdle, had gold ornaments about the hilt. The other seemed to be a servant and interpreter. This latter spoke, whilst his comrade raised his hands gracefully, from time to time, in acquiescence and deprecation. The first words made Bate laugh, for the interpreter wished to know if he would buy a diamond? Such a form of salutation the digger had been hearing every hour for twelve months of his life on the other side the world. "I'd rather sell you one," said he, "but let's look at it."

The diamond, however, was not to be seen except on terms for which Bate's experience gave no parallel. A certain sum, which proved to be no less than thirty thousand dollars, must be lodged beforehand with the manager of the Borneo Company at Kuching, and it must be lodged in cash. No paper would do. "And what then?" asked Bate, laughing. Then, it appeared, the gem might be brought for inspection. It lay a long way off, and there were many dangers to encounter. The romance of the thing began to interest my friend. He asked a number of questions, to which the answers came straight enough. Not a sixpence need be disbursed, until the stone should actually lie in his own hands. The size of it, as near as Bate could judge, would come to close on a thousand carats. White, it professed to be, as the Star of South Africa, cut, or rather polished, in the native style. It belonged to a rajah, and had lain in his family for generations.

Up to this point nothing had happened, other than I or any Bornean traveller could have predicted. Those Malays have made the same proposal to every visitor for twenty years. The new feature of the story was Bate's conduct. He didn't laugh or turn away scornfully, but invited them to the hotel next day, resolving meanwhile to take advice.

The advice he got was the same given to others in like case. All in Sarawak, or indeed out of it, believe in the dia-

mond; you will find a description of it, drawn on the mere credit of these emissaries, in the first book on precious stones coming under your hand. For two hundred years, ever since the Dutch first landed in Borneo, it has been talked of, and sought after, but never seen by white man. For, unless the traveller can lodge seven thousand five hundred pounds in cash with the Borneo Company, no chance has he of beholding the treasure. Bate had not seven thousand five hundred pounds in dollars at a moment's notice. He explained to the Malays, on their visit, that gentlemen travelling don't usually carry such a sum with them. "But," said he, "if you won't bring the diamond here, will you take me to the diamond?" This proposal startled them. They looked at each other, conferred eagerly, and made an appointment for next day. Bate took counsel again on this original idea. His acquaintances were unanimous that no danger of an ordinary sort could be feared in the adventure—no murder, nor robbery, nor wild beasts, for the belief had always prevailed that this rajah dwelt over the Sambas frontier, in Dutch territory, where also security is profound. But this might be error, and if his guides should lead him into the Sultan of Bruni's dominion, heaven help the traveller! But Bate was not daunted. The Malays agreed to take him, and he set out with delight.

So much of the following tale I can guarantee as if I had been present at the incidents, just as you might guarantee that if a man lived three days in Rome, somebody in the street would offer him a coin of Heliogabalus for sale.

With the two guides and a Kuching boy, lent to him, Bate set off up the Sarawak river. The stream appears to have been high, for they could follow its course two days. Water then failed, and the canoe was left at a Dyak house. By the suggestion of friends in the capital—where everyone felt deeply interested about his adventure—an ample store of tinned meats had been prepared, and there was other luggage, arms, and so on. More servants than the boy S'Ali had been strongly objected to by the Malays, nor did they look on even him with approval. Bate wondered how his stores were to be carried, but in an hour's time four sturdy little Dyaks came to be loaded up. The Englishman, cramped by two days' sitting in a canoe, which had also been his bed at night, would gladly have rested in the big

Dyak houses. He describes them as much more comfortable, and much better furnished, than I remember them. But his resolution at starting had been to put himself wholly under his guides' advice, and the Diamond Fields are no bad school for teaching a man to bear discomfort. So they set off, though the sun was already low, upon a "batany path," such as he found all through his journey. This is a style of road-making peculiar to Borneo. When the Dyaks find communication needful between one point and another, they fell young trees in a straight line, lop off the crowns, and painfully hoist them upon tressels. Over stream and dell the timber track is carried, with never a handrail to grasp. The Dyak will stay to chaff a friend, or to choose a tempting bit of penang from his box, poised fifty feet above a raging torrent. Bate followed his guides gallantly, balancing himself with a rope which they stretched across the more dangerous parts.

At sunset another village was reached, when Bate was invited to pay the little coolies one shilling each, whereupon they went their way. Here also the Malays had evidently an acquaintance, shaking hands with the chief inhabitants, as they sat out on their verandah, to which one climbed by a pole aslant, for the house was raised on posts. I have seen such thirty feet high, but the Land Dyaks build commonly at much less elevation. The village has but one long roof; on one side is the verandah, backed by the private chambers, belonging one to each family. House fathers sleep in the verandah, which is sheltered by the roof; bachelors, widowers, and men of war have their own round building at the end, where they lie beneath the smoke-dried heads of former foemen, with arms at hand, ready for the night attack should it occur. Thither Bate was conducted, after supping in uncomfortable state on the verandah, with two hundred pairs of eyes fixed on him in silent awe, whilst the jaws of their proprietors ground betel-nuts with the regularity of so many mills.

Next day Bate started again, taking fresh coolies. Although this part is fairly peopled, and in six days of land travel they often passed a hamlet, or a "house," as we call it, without need of stopping, the Malays invariably dismissed one set of carriers, and took another. The Englishman delayed their progress a good deal, and often he felt inclined to regret his

enterprise, for it tries the nerves, as I can testify, to balance yourself mile after mile, day after day, on hanging logs. On the eighth evening after they left Sarawak, Bate missed his chief guide. "He's gone ahead," remarked the interpreter. "Tomorrow we get home." It then occurred to my friend that he had no notion of his whereabouts, excepting only that the course had been south-west. The interpreter could not, or would not, tell him more than just the fact that they stood on Dutch territory, six days' journey from Pontianak, from which fact Bate concluded that he must be nearly at mid-distance between sea and sea.

Next day, before the sun was hot, they reached a small clearing. A river ran down one side of it, and on the other stood an ancient house, raised on high posts, mouldy, weather-stained, and very ragged as to its thatch. The ground about it had once been tossed over in that careless fashion which Malays call gardening. All that ever comes of their industry is a score or two of sweet-smelling shrubs, which, once planted, grow in straggling luxuriance. Bate's heart failed him, looking at this scene. He had fancied all sorts of oriental magnificence environing the diamond, such as is beheld amongst the rajahs with whom he did business in India. But on view of that palace he exclaimed aloud, "It is a sell!"

Beneath the house stood a man so immensely fat, that ropes and pulleys only, as it seemed, could take him up the ladder. Very handsomely was he dressed in silk, and cloth of gold. Some fine uncut emeralds shone in the ivory hilt of his kris. The chief guide stood behind this personage. "It is the rajah!" was whispered in Bate's ear, "but call him Inchi Buyong," which means, being interpreted, Squire Bird. Bate happened to know the Malay titles, and the word Buyong he had heard fifty times on his journey when looking for game. The mystery of an incognito somewhat raised his hopes again.

Squire Bird had a big, simple face, very yellow, and very pock-marked, pendulous of cheek, small-featured, and merry-looking. He came forward and shook hands, laughing, with many compliments, which the interpreter translated. Bate was smilingly motioned to ascend the ladder. He did so in gleeful haste, to watch the "getting upstairs" of that monstrous roll of flesh. But on reaching the top a vision

appeared which struck him motionless. Bate calls it a vision. He was always susceptible. I have no doubt the girl was pretty enough—Malays of high class often are. Her skin, says Bate, was palest bronze; her eyes so large, so liquid, and so innocent, that "in looking at them a man felt all the sin he had ever done, and bitterly repented it on the spot." He proceeds to state that "her little mouth was purple as a pomegranate, and her teeth like frozen dewdrops." Clothed in robes of silk, homespun, such as our looms cannot touch for grace or softness, she leaned against the door-jamb; her upper robe was bound above the bosom, under the arms. Bate cannot describe the costume, but there were folds of blue, and black, and red, all gleaming and shimmering with gold; and beneath the lowest edge such tiny bronze-like feet peeped out, as Europeans may imagine but never see. Sandals she wore, with a little emerald knot between the great and the second toe.

Bate stood and stared, till the vision, rippling into a smile, raised both hands above her head and bowed, with the little henna-stained palms turned outward. For Malays of rank, male or female, practise all customs of their Arab teachers, saving only the veil. After her bow of welcome, the girl ran lightly past, to help her large parent on his toilsome climb. More lovely still, more of a vision than before, Bate thought her, as she stood in the sunlight, gracefully bent over the ladder, warning and encouraging in soft Malay, and laughing gently. She had placed one little foot on the ladder; diamonds and emeralds gleamed upon each toe, but Bate thought it shameful to hide such perfection, even with jewels. The light wind stirred her hair, which hung to the very ground, and shook perfume from the flowers with which it was bedecked. Meanwhile, amid grunts and heavy breathing, with breathless shouts from the retainers shoving below, the rajah clambered up. Then his big head appeared, smiling anxiously at the girl, and one of her tiny hands vanished in his monstrous clutch. With teeth firmly clenched, but still with merry laughter in her eyes, she leaned back and dragged. Bate sprang to her assistance—they pushed vigorously below—the rajah panted and choked, though smiling still—and then the verandah shook beneath his ponderous tread. Evidently, it was no small event for this rajah to descend to mother earth;

his daughter welcomed him as one who comes from a desperate enterprise. Bate, who is poetic, as I said, almost wished himself a half-ton weight, to be petted like that old gentleman. They all went together into the house, where the rajah sat beaming and catching breath, whilst his servants—he had at least a score—squatted about him, or walked stooping, as is Malay fashion to signify respect. The vision had disappeared, but she came back to wait upon her father at the mid-day meal, which consisted of prawn-curry, "slippery go-downs," fried fern, and boiled capsicums. Then everybody went to sleep. Towards sundown Bate strolled abroad with his gun, accompanied by the interpreter and some dozen retainers, who cut the throat of every bird he shot with religious exactitude. He came back to find the rajah smiling as placidly as before, and supper ready. Then he was conducted to a mouldy room for the night. Not a word did anybody say about the diamond, but this silence Bate understood. In fact, he had been used to practise just the same tactics, when he had a "buyer" in his own tent.

Next day again there was no talk of the diamond. The fat rajah seemed content to sit smiling on his chair through the sultry hours, surrounded by squatting subjects, who played chess upon a board chalked out on the rotting floor. He liked to have Bate in view, feeling plainly disappointed when he left his sight. My friend was still patient, for the daughter came and went silently, quite unembarrassed, but as well aware as girl could be that she might boast an "orang putih" amongst her admirers. That sweltering day passed like the other, and a third after it. Then, in the evening, the interpreter came mysteriously; as they returned from shooting: "Inchi Buyong is satisfied," quoth he. "To-morrow, before daylight, his daughter will take you to see the diamond."

This delightful prospect of a tête-à-tête with a young lady, who could not understand a word he said, caused Bate such natural perturbation, that he missed several sentences of the interpreter's broken speech. When he listened again, the Malay was saying, "The governor of Sambas or Pontianak would give five hundred thousand dollars in silver at any time; but Inchi Buyong will never sell to a Dutchman. His grandfather's grandfather made a vow, and whilst he tortured him to

death, he cursed the son of his who sold the diamond to a Hollander." Bate listened eagerly now, for this sounded like business indeed. The Malay went on to state that everyone of the rajah's ancestors had died a violent death, guarding the diamond. Their lands had been all taken from them and their title proscribed. Farther and farther they had moved into the woods, with a few faithful retainers, dogged in their oriental loyalty. The rajah living had but one child. "You've seen her," said the Malay, and Bate coloured. He was anxious, therefore, to sell the heirloom, but not of course to a Dutchman, and to end his days in tranquillity. Open persecution had ceased in this last half century, but spies were always lying round. As the rajah's family had sworn not to sell, so there were great Dutch houses who had sworn to have the diamond. "Be sure they know your arrival in Sambas long before this time, and there may be trouble. But a friend of the Sarawak rajah, the 'baniak brani,' is not afraid, and our men will fight. No one knows, except the Inchi and his daughter, where the diamond lies. Before daylight you will be called."

A CHARMING FELLOW.

BY FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE.

AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "MABEL'S PROGRESS," &c. &c.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE night was dark and cheerless. The road from Ivy Lodge to Whitford was not lighted. At a long distance before her, Castalia saw a red, glowing speck, which she knew to be the lamp over the chemist's shop, kept by Mr. Barker, her landlord. After that, a few street lamps glimmered, and the town of Whitford had fairly begun.

It was not late, yet most of the shops were shut, and the streets were very silent and deserted. Castalia strained her eyes onward through the darkness, and presently saw her husband's figure come into the circle of faint light made by a street lamp, traverse it, and disappear again into the shade. She had walked so quickly, in her excitement, as to have overtaken him sooner than she had expected. Whither was he going?

She slunk along in the shadow of the houses, frightened at the faint sound of her own footfall on the flagstones, starting nervously at every noise, hurrying across the lighted spaces in front of the few shops

that remained open, with averted face and beating heart, fearing to be noticed by those within. But never once did she falter in her purpose of following her husband. She would have been turned back by no obstacle, short of one which defied her physical powers to pass it.

Algernon was now nearing Maxfield's house. The shutters of the shop were closed, but the door was still open, and a light streamed from it on to the pavement. Castalia followed, watching breathlessly. Her husband passed the shop, went on a pace or two, stopped at the private door, and rang the bell. She could see the action of his arm as he raised it. The door was opened without much delay, and Algernon went in.

Castalia stood still, trying to collect her thoughts, and determine on her course of action. What should she do? Her husband might be an hour—hours—in that house. She could not stand there in the street. An impulse came upon her to make herself known—to go in and tax Algernon with perfidy and deception then and there. But she checked the impulse. It would have been a desperate step. Algernon might never forgive her. It might be possible for her to reach a pitch of rage and jealousy, which would make her deaf to any such considerations—careless as to the consequences of her actions, if she could but gratify the imperious passion of the moment. She was dimly conscious that this might be possible; but for the present she had sufficient control over her own actions to pause and deliberate. There she stood, alone at night, in Whitford High-street—stealthily, trembling, and wretched—she, Castalia Kilfinane! Who would believe it? What would her uncle feel if he could see her now, or guess what she was enduring?

The idea came into her mind—floating like a waif on the current of indignant misery that seemed to flood all her spirit—that there might be hundreds of human beings, whom she had seen and thought happy, smarting with some secret wound like her own, and living lives the half of which was never known to the world. Castalia had never been apt to let her imagination busy itself with the sorrows of others, and at this moment the conception had no softening effect. It only added an extra flavour of bitterness and rebellion to her sufferings. It was too cruel. Why should such things be? And what had she done to merit so much un-

happiness? She shivered a little as a breeze from the river came bringing with it the clammy breath of the marsh mists.

How long Castalia remained standing at her post she could never reckon; she was conscious only of burning pain of mind, and of a determination not to shrink from her purpose because of the pain. A footstep came sounding along the quiet street, and startled her. She shrank back as far as she could, pressing her shoulder close against the wall, and uncertain whether to walk on or remain still. It was a man who came towards her, turning from a narrow street opening into the High-street, which Castalia knew to be Lady-lane. He walked with a very rapid step, hanging his head, and looking neither to the right nor to the left. Castalia was, perhaps, the only dweller in Whitford who would not have recognised the figure as being that of David Powell, the Methodist preacher.

As Powell neared Castalia, he seemed to become aware of her presence by some sixth sense, for to all appearance he had not looked towards her. The truth was, that all his outward perceptions were habitually disregarded by him, except such as carried with them some suggestion of helpfulness and sympathy. A fashionable lady might have stood facing him during a long sermon in chapel, or in the open fields, and (unless she had displayed signs of "grace") he would have taken no heed of her—would not have been able to tell the colour of her garments. But let the same woman be tearful, ragged, sick, or injured, and no observation could be more rapid and comprehensive than David Powell's, to convey all needful particulars of her state and requirements. So this night, as he passed along the quiet Whitford streets, the few persons he had met hitherto were to him as shadows. But when the vague outline of a woman's form made itself a blot of blacker shadow in the darkness, those accustomed sentinels, his senses, gave the spirit notice of a fellow-creature in want, possibly of bread, certainly of sympathy.

He stopped within a few paces of Castalia, and perceived by that time that she was well and warmly clad, and that her trouble, whatever it was, could not be alleviated by alms. In her desire to avoid notice, she shrank away more and more, almost crouching down against the wall. It occurred to Powell that she might be ill. "Are you suffering?" he asked, in a low musical voice. "Can I help you?"

Finding that she did not reply, he advanced a step farther, and was stretching out his hand to touch her on the shoulder, when, driven to bay, she raised herself up to her full height, and answered quickly and resentfully, "No; I am not ill. I am waiting for some one."

He stood still, irresolutely. Her voice and accent struck him with surprise. He recognised them as belonging to a person of a different class from any he had expected. How came such a lady to be alone at that hour, standing in the cold street? At length he said, gently, "If I may advise you, it would be well for you to go home. The person who keeps you waiting in the street in such weather, and at this hour, must surely be very thoughtless. Can I not assist you? I am David Powell, a poor preacher of the Word. You need have no fear of me."

"No; please to go away. I am not at all afraid. Go away, go away!" she added with an imperative emphasis, for she began to fear lest her husband should come out of the house, hear the sound of her voice, and find her there. Powell obeyed her, and walked slowly away. There was, in truth, so far as he knew, no reason to fear that any evil could happen to the woman in Whitford High-street, except the evil of standing so long in the cold, raw weather. It had now begun to rain; a fine drizzling rain, that was very chill.

When he had walked some distance along the High-street, and was close to the turning that led to Mrs. Thimbleby's house, he stopped and looked back. Almost at the same moment he saw a man come out of Maxfield's house, and advance along the street towards him. Then, at a rather long interval, the cloaked lady began to move onward also, but without overtaking the man, or apparently trying to do so. It was a strange adventure, and one entirely unparalleled in Powell's experience of the little town, and after he had reached his lodgings he could not, for a long time, divert his thoughts from dwelling on it.

Meanwhile Algernon, unconscious of the watcher behind him, proceeded straight onward to the post-office. Then he turned up the narrow entry, in which was the side door that gave access to his private office. Castalia did not follow him beyond the mouth of the entry. Standing there and listening, she heard the sharp sound of a match being struck, then the turning of a key, and a door softly opened and shut.

It then struck Castalia that this unexpected visit to the office afforded an opportunity for her to reach home, without her husband's discovering her absence. She had not considered before how this was to be accomplished; and, indeed, had Algernon returned directly to Ivy Lodge from Maxfield's house, it would have been impossible. She now saw this, and hastened back along the road, in a tremor at her narrow escape; for, although the impulse had crossed her mind to declare herself, and boldly enter Maxfield's house in quest of her husband, that was a very different matter from being discovered against her will. In the latter case she would, as she well knew, have been at an immense disadvantage with her husband, who, instead of being accused, would become accuser.

Nothing short, indeed, of the passion of jealousy within her would have given her strength to combat her husband.

"I could bear anything else! Anything else!" she said to herself. "But to be fooled and deceived, and put aside for that girl——!" A great hot wave of passion seemed to flow through her whole body, as she thought of Rhoda. "Let the servants see me! What do I care?" she said, recklessly. At that moment she would not have heeded if the whole town had seen her, and known her errand into Whitford, and its result. She rang loudly at the bell of Ivy Lodge, and walked in past the servant, with a white face and glittering eyes.

"Isn't master coming?" stammered the girl, staring at her mistress.

"I don't know. Go to bed. I don't want you."

There was something in her face which checked further speech on Lydia's part. Lydia was fairly frightened. She crept away to the garret, where Polly was already sleeping soundly, and vainly tried to rouse her fellow-servant, to feel some interest in her account of how missus had stalked into the house by herself like a ghost, and had ordered her off to bed, and to get up a discussion as to missus's strange goings on altogether of late.

Castalia went to her own room, uncertain whether to undress and go to bed, or to remain up and confront her husband, when he should return. One dominant desire had been growing in her heart for many days past, and had now become a force overwhelming all smaller motives, and drawing them resistlessly into its strong current. This dominant desire was

to be revenged—not on her husband, but on Rhoda Maxfield. And it might be that by waiting and watching yet awhile, by concealing from Ancram the discovery she had that night made, she might be enabled more effectually to strike at her rival. If Ancram knew, he would try to shield Rhoda. He would put the thing in such a light before the world as to elicit sympathy for Rhoda and make his wife appear ridiculous or obnoxious. He had the gift to do such things when it pleased him. No; she would keep her own counsel yet awhile longer.

When Algernon came home about midnight, letting himself into the house with a private key, he found his wife asleep, or seeming to sleep, and congratulated himself on escaping the querulous catechism as to where he had been, and what he had been doing, which he would have to endure had Castalia been awake on his return. As he crossed the bedchamber to his dressing-room, she moved, and put up one hand to screen her eyes from the light.

"Don't let me disturb you, Cassy," he said. "I have been detained very late. I am going downstairs again—there is a spark of fire in the dining-room—to have one cigar before I turn in. Go to sleep again."

He bent down to kiss her, but she kept her face obstinately buried in the pillow. So he took her left hand, which hung down, and lightly touched it with his lips, saying, "Poor sleepy Cassy!" and went away.

And then she raised the thin left hand, on which her wedding-ring hung loosely, and passionately kissed it where her husband's lips had rested, and burst into a storm of crying, until she fairly sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"So you had that fine gentleman, Mr. Algernon—What-d'ye-call-it—Errington, here last evening?" said Jonathan Maxfield to his daughter, on his return from Duckwell.

"Yes, father; he had been before in the afternoon. He was very anxious to see you; but Aunt Betty told him you wouldn't be back until to-day."

"Very anxious to see me, was he? I have my own opinion about that. But, no doubt, he wants me to believe that he's anxious."

"He seems in a good deal of distress of mind, father."

"I daresay. And what about the mind of the folks as hold his promises to pay? Just so much waste paper, those

are, I take it; I'd as lief have his word of honour myself. And most people in Whitford know what that's worth!"

"I think he has been very unfortunate, father."

"H'm! What worldly folks calls misfortin' is generally the Lord's dealing according to deserts. It's set forth in Scripture that the righteous man shall prosper, and the unrighteous be brought to naught."

"But—father, even good people are sometimes chastened by afflictions," said Rhoda, timidly.

Old Max knitted his brows.

"There's nothing," said he, "more dangerous than for the young and inexperienced to wrest texts; it leads 'em far astray. When that kind o' chastening is spoken of, it don't mean the sort of trouble as has fallen on young Errington. The Almighty has given every man reason enough to understand that, if he spends thirteenspence out of every shilling, he'll be beggared before the year's end. I don't believe in men being ruined without fault or foolishness of their own."

"He asked me if I—if you—if I thought—he asked me to ask you to have a little patience with him about some bills. I didn't know that he had any bill here; but he said you would understand."

"Aye, aye! I understand. It isn't bills for tea, and flour, and bacon, and such like. It's a different kind o' bills the young gentleman's been meddling with; and a fine hand he's made of it!"

"Couldn't you help him, father?"

Rhoda spoke pleadingly, but with the timidity which always attended her requests to her father, whose recent indulgence had never reached a point of weakness, and who clearly showed, in all his dealings with his daughter, that he was not carried away by his affection for her, but acted with the consciousness of a will unfettered by precedents, and perfectly able to choose its course, without regard to what other people might expect of him.

For herself, in pleading for Algernon, she was not moved by self-conscious sentimentality, neither did she suppose herself to be doing anything heroic. The peculiar tenderness she still felt for him was made up of pity and memory. The Algy she had loved was gone—had melted into thin air, like a dream under the morning sunlight. Mr. Errington, the postmaster of Whitford, and the husband of the Honourable Castalia Kilfinane, was

a very different personage. Still he was inextricably connected in her mind with that bright idol of her childhood and her youth. His marriage had put all possibility of love-making between him and herself as much out of the question, to her mind, as if he had been proved to be her brother. Rhoda had read no romances, and she was neither of an innovating spirit nor a passionate temperament, and it is surprising what power a sincere conviction of the irrevocable and inevitable has to control the "natural feelings" we hear so much of! But she clung to a better opinion of Algernon than his actions warranted—as has been the case with many another woman—chiefly to justify herself for ever having loved him.

"Couldn't you help him, father?" she repeated, seeing that her father did not at once reply, but was sitting meditating, with a not altogether ill-pleased expression of face.

"Help him!" cried old Max. "Why should I help him? A reprobate, unregenerate, vain, ungrateful worldling! I did help him once, and earned much gratitude for my pains. And what a sneaking, poor, mean, pitiful fellow he must be to come here and whine to you! A poor, pitiful fellow! Talk of a gentleman! Yah!"

Old Max derived so much grim satisfaction from the contemplation of Algernon's pitiful behaviour that it seemed almost to soften him towards the culprit, in whom any glimpse of nobility would not have been very welcome to his enemy. When you hate a man on excellent private grounds, it is certainly unpleasant to see him displaying qualities in public which win admiration. And this aggravation was one which old Max had been suffering for some time, at the hands of the popular Algernon. His present money difficulties, combined with his unworthy methods of meeting them, at once gratified and justified Jonathan Maxfield's vindictiveness.

He gave forth the queer granting noise that served him for a laugh, as he said, "And a lot o' good his fine marriage has done him! And his grand relations! I told him long ago that if he wanted help from such as them, he must ask it with a pocket full of money. Then he might ha' been uplifted into high places. And it wasn't only my own wisdom neither, though that might ha' been enough for such a half-fledged young cockerel as he was in them days, seeing it has been enough for his

bettors before now. I had the warrant of Scripture; for what says Solomon? 'Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.'"

Still Rhoda did not altogether despair of inducing her father to do something for Algernon. What that something might be, or how far it was possible for her father to assist young Errington, except by simply giving or lending him money, Rhoda did not know. Algernon in talking to her had spoken very glibly, but, to her, very unintelligibly, of bills which were in her father's hands; and had pointed out, with an air of candour and conviction, that it would be imprudent on Mr. Maxfield's part to drive matters to extremity. It had all sounded very convincing, simply from the tone in which it was said. Many of us are astonishingly uncritical as to the coherence and cogency of words, if they be but set to a good tune.

Algernon himself was rather hopeful since that interview with Rhoda. It could not be, after all, that Jonathan Maxfield would actually cause him, Algernon Errington, any personal inconvenience for the sake of a sum which was really a mere trifle to Maxfield, and which appeared very trifling to Algernon, under every aspect except that of being called upon to pay it.

He had learned not long previously that certain bills he had given, backed by the name of that solid capitalist, the Honourable Jack Price, had found their way into old Max's hands. This startled him considerably, for he had no reason to count on the old man's forbearance. The time was drawing nigh when the bills would become due.

About a month ago some other bills had fallen due, and had been duly honoured. They had been given to a London wine merchant, who would certainly not have scrupled to take any strong measure for getting his money. And even the name of Jack Price was no talisman to charm away this grasping tradesman's determination to be paid for goods delivered; the wine merchant in question doing a large City business, and feeling no anxiety as to the opinion entertained by the Honourable Mr. Price's fashionable connection about himself or his wares. Under the pressure of this disagreeable conviction, the money had been found to honour the bills held by the wine merchant.

For the discharge of the liabilities represented by the bills now in Maxfield's hands, Algernon had reckoned on Castalia's ex-

tracting some money from her uncle. Algernon did not abandon the hope that she might yet succeed in doing so. Castalia must be urged to make new and stronger representations of their necessities to Lord Seely. But it could not be denied that my lord's last letter had been a very heavy blow; and that, moreover, a number of slight embarrassments, which Algernon had hitherto looked on as mere gossamer threads, to be broken when he pleased, had recently exhibited a disconcerting toughness, and power of constraining his actions and destroying his comfort.

The thought not infrequently occurred to him that, if he were alone in the world, unhampered by a wife who had no flexibility of character, and who had recently displayed a stubborn kind of obtuseness, showing itself in such remarks as that if they had not money to pay for luxuries, they must do without luxuries, and that if they were poor, it would be better to seem poor, and the like dull commonplaces, which were peculiarly distasteful to Algernon's vivacious intelligence—if, he thought, he had no wife, or a different wife, things would undoubtedly go better with him. He was too quick not to perceive that his marriage, far from improving his social position, had been eminently unpopular amongst his friends and acquaintances. To be sure he had never intended to return to Whitford after allying himself with the family of Lord Seely. He had meant to shake the dust of the sleepy little town from his feet for ever. He reckoned up the advantages he had expected to gain by marrying Castalia, and set the real result against each one in his mind.

He had expected to get into the Diplomatic Service. He was a provincial postmaster!

He had expected to live in some splendid metropolis. He found himself in the obscure town which, of all others, he wished to avoid!

He had expected to be courted and caressed by wealthy, noble, and distinguished persons. He was looked coldly or shyly upon by even the insignificant middle-class society of a county town!

All this seemed peculiarly hard and unjust, because Algernon had always intended to bear his honours gracefully, without stiffness or arrogance. He would cut nobody; he would turn the cold shoulder to nobody. He had pictured himself, sometimes, making a meteoric reappearance in Whitford; flashing with brief brilliancy across the horizon of that remote neigh-

bourhood; affably shaking hands with old acquaintance; occupying the best rooms in the Blue Bell, and scattering largesse among the servants; or rattling through the streets side by side with some county magnate, whose companionship should by no means chill his recognition of such local stars of the second or third magnitude as the Pawkinses of Pudcombe Hall. He was inclined by taste and temperament to be thoroughly "bon prince."

Such fancies may seem childish, but it was a fact that Algernon had indulged in them. With all his tact, he had a considerable strain of his mother's Ancramism in his blood. And the contrast between those former day-dreams and the present reality was so terrible, so mortifying, so ridiculous (direst and most soul-chilling word of all to Algernon!) that he was unable to face it. Some way out must be found. It was impossible, on any tenable theory of society, that he should be permanently consigned to oblivion and the daily round of inglorious duties.

As to what Lord Seely said about meriting advancement by diligence, and working for ten or fifteen years, it seemed to Algernon pretty much like exhorting a convict to step his daily round of treadmill in so painstaking a manner, as to win the approbation of the gaol authorities. What would he care for their approbation? It was impossible to take either pride or pleasure in working out one's penal sentence.

Algernon felt very bitter against Lord Seely as he pondered these things, and not a little bitter against Castalia, who had, as it were, bound him to this wheel, and had latterly added the sting of her intolerable temper to his other vexations. Fate had used him despitefully. He seemed to consider that some gratitude was due to him on the part of the supernal powers for his excellent intentions—he would have borne prosperity so well! A feeling grew upon him, which would have been desperation, but for his ever-present, instinctive efforts not to hurt himself.

On the morning after the visit to Maxfield's house—of which Castalia had been an unseen witness—Algernon went to the post-office somewhat earlier than usual. As he reached it a man was coming out, who scowled upon him with so sullen and hostile a countenance, that it affected him like a blow. He was, on the whole, in better spirits on this special morning than he had been for some time past. Not that he was habitually depressed by his troubles,

but there was a certain apprehension and anxiety in his daily life which flavoured it all unpleasantly. But on this morning he was, for various reasons, feeling hopeful of at least a reprieve from care, and the man's angry frown not only hurt but startled him.

"Who is that fellow who has just gone out?" he asked of Gibbs, entering the office by the public door instead of his own private one, in order to put the question.

"That is Roger Heath, the man who has lost his money-letter."

"An uncommonly ill-looking rascal, I take leave to think!"

"Ahem! He is a decent, God-fearing man, sir, I believe; but at present he is wrath, and not without some excuse, either. He tells me he has written to the head office——"

"And what then?"

"And has been told that due inquiries will be made, of course."

"And what then?"

"Why then—I suppose that's the last he'll hear of it."

Algernon lightly flicked a white handkerchief over his face and bright curling hair, filling the close little office with a delicate perfume as he said, "So there's an end of that!"

"An end of it, I suppose, so far as Heath is concerned. But I doubt we shall hear more of the matter in the office."

Algernon paused with his hand on the lock of the door leading to his private room. He kept his hand there, and scarcely turned his head as he asked, "How so?"

Mr. Gibbs shook his head, and began to expatiate on the singular misfortunes which had been accumulated on the Whitford Post-office, and to hint that when two or three suspicious cases had followed each other in that way, an office was marked by the superior authorities, and means were taken to discover the culprit.

"Means! What means?" said Algernon, carelessly. "You said yourself that it was next to impossible to trace a stolen letter. And, really, if people will be such idiots as to send money by post without precaution, in spite of all the warnings that are given to them, they deserve to lose it!"

"That may be, sir. Still, of course, it is no light matter to steal a letter. And as to the means of tracing it, why I have heard of trap-letters being sent, containing marked money."

The handle clicked, the door was opened

and sharply shut again, and the Whitford postmaster disappeared into his private room.

It was more than an hour before Algernon reappeared in the outer office. He advanced towards Gibbs, and leaning on his shoulder with great affability, said to him in a low voice, "You've no suspicion of any one about this place, eh? The old woman that cleans the office, that boy Jem, no suspicion of anybody, eh? Oh! well I'm excessively glad of that! One hates to be distrustful of the people about one."

Gibbs shook his head emphatically and decisively. "No one has access to the office unless in my presence, sir; not a creature."

"The fact is," said Algernon, slowly, "that I have missed one or two papers of my own lately; matters of no consequence. God knows why any one should have thought it worth while to take them! But they're gone."

Gibbs looked up with serious alarm in his face.

"Dear me, sir!" he exclaimed; "dear me, Mr. Errington! I wish you had mentioned this before."

"Oh well, you know, I thought I might be mistaken. I hate being on the watch about trifles. But, latterly, I am quite sure that papers have disappeared from my secretaire."

"From that little cabinet with drawers in it, that stands in your room?"

"Exactly."

"But—I was under the impression that you kept that carefully locked!"

Algernon laughed outright. "What a fellow you are, Gibbs! Fancy my keeping anything carefully locked! The fact is, it is as often open as shut. Only a few days ago, for instance, Mrs. Errington mentioned to me that she found it unlocked when she was here——" He stopped, as if struck by a sudden thought, and turned his eyes away from Gibbs, who was looking up at him with the same uneasy expression on his face. "By-the-way, Mrs. Errington did not stay very long here, did she?" asked Algernon, with a degree of marked embarrassment very unusual in him. It was an embarrassment so ingeniously displayed, that one might almost have suspected he wished it to be observed.

"When do you mean, sir? Mrs. Errington comes very often; very often, indeed."

"Does she?—I mean—I mean the last time she was here. Did she stay long then?"

"N—no," answered Gibbs, removing his eyes from Algernon's face, and biting the feather of his pen thoughtfully. "At least I think not, sir. I cannot be sure. She very often does not pass out through my office, but goes away by the private door in the passage."

There was a pause.

"I really am very glad that you don't suspect any of the people about the place, Gibbs," said Algernon at length, rousing himself with some apparent effort from a reverie. "As long as I have any authority here, no innocent person shall be made unhappy for one moment by watchfulness and suspicion."

"That's a very kind feeling, Mr. Errington. But I shouldn't think an innocent person would mind being watched in such a case. For my own part, I hope we shall trace the matter out. It shan't be my fault if we don't."

"You are wonderfully energetic, Gibbs. An invaluable public servant. But, Gibbs, it will not, I think, be any part of your duty to mention to any one, at present, the losses I have spoken of from my secretaire. There is no reason, as yet, to connect them with the missing letters. I did not duly consider what I was saying. The papers, after all, were only private letters of my own, Gibbs. They concern no one but myself. They could have had no value for a thief, you know. I—I daresay I mislaid them, and never put them into the secretaire at all."

Algernon went away with downcast eyes and hurried step, and Mr. Gibbs stared after him with a bewildered gaze. Then slowly the expression of his face changed to one of consternation and pity. "Poor young man!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "That woman has been making free with his papers beyond a doubt! And he does his best to shield her. A worldly-minded, vain woman she is, that looks at us as if we were made of a different kind of clay from her. And they say she is furiously jealous of her husband. But this—this is serious! This is very serious, indeed. I am sorry for the young man with all my heart!"

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